

**PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS: MATERIAL SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

**GOVT S-1540**

**THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY**

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Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00pm–3:00pm.

**Teaching Fellow**

TBA

**Course Description and Objectives**

The president is the single most powerful and visible individual in the American political system. It has not always been this way. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, British academic Lord James Bryce dedicated an entire chapter to explaining why, as he saw it, “Great Men Are Not Chosen President” but instead tended to be so ordinary and commonplace. Fifty years later, Richard Neustadt, aide to President Harry Truman who subsequently taught at the Kennedy School of Government, wrote that the Constitution reduces presidents to “mere clerks.” Today, presidential power is as salient as it has ever been in our country’s history. Rarely does a day pass without finding an editorial in a major U.S. newspaper that laments the concentration of power in the presidency. And after one of the most divisive elections the U.S. has experienced, understanding the power of — and, just as importantly, the constraints on — the individual who inhabits the White House is a critical task for explaining our contemporary politics.

This course surveys the politics of presidential power in a system where power is separated between but also *shared* by adjoining branches of government. From this institutional perspective, the course will engage the following questions: What is presidential power? For what aims do presidents exercise their powers? When do presidents successfully achieve their goals — and when do they fail? How do presidents manage relations with Congress? To what degree do presidents shape

public opinion? What is presidential leadership and when is it most clearly exhibited? How do presidents approach questions of war and peace? What are the implications of presidential power for policy outcomes and the American political system? Through answering these questions, the course provides a deeper understanding of the factors that shape presidential power, its exercise, and the nature of the American system of government.

The course reading list is designed to offer diverse and sometimes competing perspectives on many of the key questions that animate debates about the presidency. Unfortunately, as with all such courses, limits on our time require that some topics receive less attention than they could. For example, the course will not provide a full treatment of topics such as bureaucratic politics, the Executive Office of the President, presidential rhetoric, the president's relations with media, or the politics of presidential mandates. I encourage you to consider how the theoretical perspectives provided in the class might provide insight that is relevant for these and other topics. If you are interested in these or other topics that are not covered in depth, you might consider writing about them for your short response essays or research proposal. Along with the other subjects covered in the course, these would also be appropriate topics for a senior thesis.

While there are no formal prerequisites for this course, the material presumes that students possess a working understanding of the American political and electoral system. Students who feel deficient in this area are strongly encouraged to purchase the recommended textbooks.

## Course Meetings

The course meets twice per week. Attending all meetings is a natural expectation of the course and students are responsible for all assigned readings. All readings should be completed prior to the course meetings, which will be a combination of lecture, discussion, and small group activities, and students are expected to be active participants in each. Readings can be obtained via Canvas unless noted otherwise.

## Course Requirements

Your evaluation for the course will be based on the components described below. All assignments are graded on a standard A through F grading scale; the course is not offered on a pass/fail basis.

**Discussion leading and participation: 20%.** Each student will serve as a discussion leader for one of our class meetings and will be responsible for presenting one of

the readings. These presentations should be short (5-10 minutes) and accompanied by a presentation of no more than **five** slides created with PowerPoint. These slides should be sent to the instructor by 9am on the day of the presentation. These presentations should not simply summarize the readings, but instead could, for example, identify the main themes and points of agreement and disagreement between them, discuss how well the readings explain observed political phenomena, raise methodological issues. The presentation should then identify a set of questions to motivate our conversation for the class. Discussion assignments will be made in class on June 25. Discussion-leading and participation each count half toward this component of the course grade.

**Class discussion: 25%.** One of the course's goals is to provide students with a set of analytic tools that can be applied to real-world politics. To help make this connection, our course will use [YellowDig](#) (accessed via Canvas) to develop insights on contemporary political news events. Students are expected to submit five short responses to articles from major news sources on some aspect of the American presidency. In approximately 250 words, students should use the material from the course to engage the claims made in the article. Based on our class discussions and readings, do you believe the author is correct or misguided? What has the author missed, overlooked, or misunderstood? What have political scientists missed, overlooked, or misunderstood? Responses are due by 5pm on each of the first five Fridays.

Students are also expected and required to engage with their classmates' postings on Yellowdig. Over the course of the semester, students must read and provide comments on 15 of their classmates' posts, with no more than five in a single week. These responses need not be either formal or long; a few sentences is sufficient. However, they should engage the author in a constructive and considerate manner. These comments must be posted by August 2.

YellowDig posts will count three-fourths and comments on them will count one-fourth toward this component of the course grade.

**Writing assignments: 30%.** Students will complete three short essays during the class which asks students to reflect upon the material discussed in class. These essays should be typed and no longer than two pages (double-spaced). These writing assignments will be due on July 12, 19, and 26, and the prompts will be distributed one week before their due dates. They will be submitted via Canvas.

**Research project: 25%.** Due Tuesday, August 6 by 5pm (submitted via Canvas). It is likely our course will raise more questions for you than it will answer – and this

is a good thing! Using the tools of social science inquiry, students should prepare an original research project related to the American presidency. We will devote a significant portion of our class time together to working on the research projects. As part of this project, students will present an overview of their research to the class on August 1. Additional details about the project, including specific formatting guidelines, requirements, and benchmarks will be discussed in the second week of class.

## Late assignments

Late assignments are extremely discouraged and will be heavily penalized without a note from a doctor or resident dean. Written assignments will be penalized two-thirds of a letter grade (e.g., from B+ to B-) for every day late. Students will be unable to make up the final exam without documentation from a doctor or university official.

## Academic integrity

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-responsibilities>) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources-support-academic-integrity>) where you will find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

## Collaboration

Collaboration, discussion, and the exchange of ideas is essential to the course and to academic research more generally. You are permitted and in fact encouraged to discuss the material from the course with classmates and others. For instance, you may study with others and you may discuss your ideas for the short essays and the research paper with others. However, all submitted work must be your own. **Collaboration on the exam is strictly prohibited.** In addition to avoiding plagiarism, your written work must reflect your own ideas and your own writing.

## Accessibility

The Summer School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Accessibility Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit <http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibility-services> for more information. Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessibility Office in the Division of Continuing Education and speak with the professor by the end of the first week of the term.

## Resources for writing

We all need help with our writing. Fortunately, the Writing Center (<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/writing-center>) is available for just this purpose — but it is vastly underutilized. Please do not hesitate to contact the Writing Center if you would like assistance with developing or communicating your ideas for the course's written assignments.

## Technology in the classroom

Depending on how it is used, technology can be an important classroom resource. It can also hinder your learning and your classmates' learning. All cell phones must be set to silent in class lectures and section meetings. Texting, emailing, Facebooking, etc. during class is also not permitted via cell phone, laptop, iPad, or any other device. The use of laptops and iPads is permitted for the purposes of taking notes and accessing course materials. However, you should be aware that growing evidence shows that laptop use is associated with significantly worse classroom performance for users (see, e.g., <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272775716307129>); it can also distract your classmates and detract from their learning experience. The instructor reserves the right to prohibit the use of all electronic materials at his discretion if such a ban appears warranted.

## Course readings

There is no required textbook. All course readings are available from the *Files* section of the course Canvas site. Readings should be completed in advance of the class meeting for which they are listed. Completing the reading prior to class will enable students to get the most from that day's lecture. A sound understanding of the assigned readings is also critical for effective class discussions.

The course reading list has been curated with multiple goals in mind. For instance, I have sought to provide a balance of: primary sources and secondary literature; classic perspectives and contemporary counterarguments; readings that highlight the value of social science research while also remaining accessible, and; normative and positive perspectives. As a result, the reading list is fairly long for some classes but varies in length from class to class. I encourage students to form reading groups that meet outside of class as a commitment device for completing and engaging with the readings.

While the course has no formal prerequisites, the course does presume familiarity with U.S. government. Students who wish to improve their background knowledge of the American presidency or the American political system are encouraged to purchase one or both of the following books:

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2016. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 14th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton.

Milkis, Sidney M., and Michael Nelson. 2016. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776—2014*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

## Course schedule

June 25. Introduction; Colonial origins.

Constitution of the United States, Article II (<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript#toc-article-ii->).

Declaration of Independence (<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>).

*The Federalist Papers*, #69 ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed69.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed69.asp)) and #70 ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed70.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed70.asp)).

*Optional*: Eric Nelson. 2014. *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Introduction.

June 27. Institutional transformation and presidential power.

Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson. 2014. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2014*. Chapters 3 and 8.

Richard Neustadt. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press.

Introduction, chapters 1 and 3.

William G. Howell. 2013. *Thinking about the Presidency*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

#### July 2. The Legislative Presidency.

Keith Krehbiel. 1998. *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 2 and 7.

Frances E. Lee. 2008. "Dividers, Not Uniters: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1981-2004." *Journal of Politics* 70: 914-928.

Charles M. Cameron. 2009. "The Presidential Veto." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*. George C. Edwards III and William G. Howell, editors. New York: Oxford University Press.

Amber Phillips. 2017. "5 tough lessons Congress learned in the Year of Trump." *Washington Post*, December 27. Available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/12/26/5-tough-lessons-congress-learned-in-the-year-of-trump/?utm\\_term=.6b577a26ef42](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/12/26/5-tough-lessons-congress-learned-in-the-year-of-trump/?utm_term=.6b577a26ef42).

Julia Hirschfeld Davis. 2015. "In Wielding Rarely Used Veto, President Obama Puts Budget Heat on Republicans." *New York Times*. October 22, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/23/us/politics/obama-vetoes-defense-bill-deepening-budget-fight-with-gop.html>.

#### July 4. NO CLASS. Just say no: politics of presidential vetoes.

#### July 9. Going it alone: presidential prerogative and unilateral powers.

William Howell. 2005. "Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Concurrent opinion by Justice Robert Jackson in *Youngstown Sheet Tube Co. v. Sawyer*: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/343/579/case.html#634>.

Michiko Kakutani. 2007. "The Case that the President's Reach Exceeds His Grasp." *New York Times*, September 25, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/25/books/25kaku.html>

Tara Golshan. 2018. "Why Trump can raise steel tariffs without Congress." *Vox*, March 8. <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/8/17097206/trump-tariffs-congress>.

July 11. Presidents and the judiciary.

- Keith E. Whittington. 2009. "Judicial Checks on the Presidency." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Presidency*. Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jeff Yates and Andrew Whitford. 1998. "Presidential Power and the United States Supreme Court." *Political Research Quarterly* 51: 539-550.
- The Federalist Papers*, #76 ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed76.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed76.asp)) and #77 ([http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/fed77.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed77.asp)).
- The Economist*. 2018. "Donald Trump's judicial appointments may prove his most enduring legacy." January 11, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/node/21734409>
- Adam Liptak. 2017. "Why Obama Struggled at Court, and Trump May Strain to Do Better." *New York Times*, January 23. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/us/politics/obama-supreme-court-win-rate-trump.html>

July 16. Political control of the executive branch.

- David E. Lewis and Terry M. Moe. 2013. "The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Levers of Presidential Control." In Michael Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System*, pages 374-405.
- Sanford C. Gordon. 2011. "Politicizing Agency Spending Authority: Lessons from a Bush-era Scandal." *American Political Science Review* 105:717-734.
- Lisa Rein and Andrew Ba Tran. 2017. "How the Trump era is changing the federal bureaucracy." *Washington Post*, December 30. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-the-trump-era-is-changing-the-federal-bureaucracy/2017/12/30/8d5149c6-daa7-11e7-b859-fb0995360725\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7401bb4c045e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-the-trump-era-is-changing-the-federal-bureaucracy/2017/12/30/8d5149c6-daa7-11e7-b859-fb0995360725_story.html?utm_term=.7401bb4c045e).
- John F. Harris and Daniel Lippman. 2017. "Trump's enemies within." *Politico Magazine*, February 2. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/trumps-enemies-within-214735>.
- Anonymous. 2018. "I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration." *New York Times*, September 5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/opinion/trump-white-house-anonymous-resistance.html>

July 18. The two presidencies, war, and presidential power.

- Brandice Canes-Wrone, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis. 2008. "Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis." *Journal of Politics* 70: 1-16.



- Aaron Wildavsky. 1966. "The Two Presidencies." *Trans-Action* 4: 7-14.
- William G. Howell, Saul P. Jackman, and Jon C. Rogowski. 2013. *The Wartime President: Executive Influence and the Nationalizing Politics of Threat*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-2; skim 4-5.
- William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. "When Congress Stops Wars." *Foreign Affairs* September/October: 95-107. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2007-09-01/when-congress-stops-wars>
- Dara Lind. 2017. "Does Trump need congressional approval to strike Syria? The debate, explained." *Vox*, April 7. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/4/7/15217832/aumf-trump-syria-congress>.
- Gene Healy and John Glaser. 2018. "Repeal, Don't Replace, Trump's War Powers." *New York Times*, April 17. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/17/opinion/repeal-replace-trump-war-powers.html>.

#### July 23. Public opinion, representation, and the presidency.

- Samuel Kernell. 2006. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Fourth edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Douglas Kriner and Andrew Reeves. 2015. "Presidential Particularism and Divide-the-Dollar Politics." *American Political Science Review* 109: 155-171.
- Brandice Canes-Wrone and Jason P. Kelly. 2013. "The Obama Presidency, Public Position-Taking, and Mass Opinion." *Polity* 45: 85-104.
- Andy Sullivan. 2012. "It's not just the economy: Why football and sharks can affect elections." Reuters, October 6, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-campaign-uninformed-voters/its-not-just-the-economy-why-football-and-sharks-can-affect-elections-idUSBRE89503720121006>

#### July 25. Accountability.

- Mueller, John. 1970. "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson." *American Political Science Review* 65: 18-34.
- Keith E. Whittington. 2017. "So what exactly counts as an impeachable offense?" *Washington Post*, May 24, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/24/so-what-exactly-counts-as-an-impeachable-offense-spoiler-its-a-trick-question/?utm\\_term=.b5898e83f7bd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/24/so-what-exactly-counts-as-an-impeachable-offense-spoiler-its-a-trick-question/?utm_term=.b5898e83f7bd)
- Brendan Nyhan. 2017. "Why Trump's Base of Support May Be Smaller Than It Seems." *New York Times*, July 19, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/upshot/why-trumps-base-of-support-may-be-smaller-than-it-seems.html>

Doug Kriner and Eric Schickler. 2018. "What can House Democrats accomplish with their new oversight and investigative powers?" *Washington Post*. Available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/28/what-can-house-democrats-accomplish-with-their-new-oversight-and-investigative-powers/?utm\\_term=.408959c912c6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/11/28/what-can-house-democrats-accomplish-with-their-new-oversight-and-investigative-powers/?utm_term=.408959c912c6).

July 30. Presidential transformation and American democracy.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown. Introduction and Chapter 1.

Juan J. Linz. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1: 51-69.

William G. Howell and Terry M. Moe. 2016. *Relic: How Our Constitution Undermines Effective Governance — And Why We Need a More Powerful Presidency*. Chapters 3 and 4.

Stephen Skowronek. "Is Donald Trump the Great Disrupter? Probably not." *Washington Post*, April 24, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/is-donald-trump-the-great-disruptor-probably-not/2017/04/24/99c86938-25d9-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.31248d094621](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/is-donald-trump-the-great-disruptor-probably-not/2017/04/24/99c86938-25d9-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409_story.html?utm_term=.31248d094621).

August 1. Research project presentations.

**RESEARCH PAPERS: DUE 5PM ON AUGUST 6.**